**Reflections – 16-22 March 2025 - Second Sunday of Lent**

**Genesis 15:1-12,17-18 – Now and not yet**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Loving God, we gather today
to explore your promise to always
have our best interests at heart.
Help us as we think about the promises we make too.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

###  **The Lord’s Covenant with Abram**

**15**After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.
    I am your shield,
    your very great reward.”

**2**But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inheritmy estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3**And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

**4**Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” **5**He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspringbe.”

**6**Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

**7**He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

**8**But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

**9**So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

**10**Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. **11**Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

**12**As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

**17**When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. **18**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi[[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2015&version=NIV#fen-NIV-379e)] of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

This part of Abram’s (later Abraham) life comes early on in the ‘big story’ of the people of God.  The story begins when Abram, Joseph’s great-grandfather, is called by God to leave his home and set off on a journey, destination unknown, with the promise that he will become a great nation. When he reaches Canaan, God promises Abram that this land will belong to his descendants. The events of this passage occur sometime later, after further journeying, some hazardous encounters and reiteration of God’s promise. Up to this point Abram has trusted God, including (in the preceding passage) choosing God rather than the creating of a new ally. However, his doubts are rising and, when God tells him not to be afraid, they come to the fore as Abram admits he cannot see a way for God’s promises to come true.

The ritual with the animals is part of a common commitment-making ceremony in the ancient Near East, a way of sealing a solemn agreement. Passing between the two halves of the slaughtered animal was a declaration of the seriousness of intention, inviting God to do to the promiser what had been done to the animal if the commitment was broken. God’s timing may not be what Abram would wish, but Abram is asked to trust that God will keep the promise of innumerable descendants.

In the verses missing from the lectionary reading, verses 13-16, God goes further, foretelling to Abram the time when his descendants will be slaves in another land, and when God will rescue them and return them to this land that has been promised to Abram. We look back knowing the rest of this story – of Joseph, slavery, Moses and the Exodus and wilderness wandering – but for Abram this is all part of the ‘not yet’.

 **Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

God is a master of impossible promises: that is, impossible to us, with our tiny imaginations! Have we sometimes tried to emulate God by offering our own impossible promises on the spur of the moment? Who hasn’t offered help to a friend, any time day or night? But when the time comes and we receive that desperate phone call, how many of us are able to drop everything in the middle of a working day or in the small hours? God keeps his promises; we may sometimes find it more difficult!

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A nebula in space with stars  AI-generated content may be incorrect. |  |

* What strikes you about this image (taken by the Webb telescope)?
* Have you ever had a promise that seemed impossible, fulfilled?
* What does God promise us right now, and what are we promised for the future?

**Prayer**

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for this day.
We thank you for the many ways you speak to us:
through your Word, visions, dreams and other people.
Thank you that you see the bigger picture –
you see the whole story from start to finish.
Each day for us is a new page in life’s book,
revealing ups and downs,
promises for now and for what is yet to come.
Thank you that unwavering trust in you banishes
all dark shadows and uncertainties.
Help us to walk in faith.
**All praise to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**
**Amen.**